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SUBJECT: ECOWAS AND UN MEETINGS ON GUINEA'S POLITICAL
TRANSITION

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Charge attended two meetings over the weekend, one with a visiting ECOWAS delegation, and one with the UN regional representative out of Dakar. Diplomats highlighted key concerns, which included questions as to how the new Guinean Government will be structured, who will ultimately hold power, and what role the CNDD (Council for Democracy and Development) will play. Although Western diplomats continued to push for a six month timeline for elections, most ECOWAS nations and the United Nations seemed willing to work toward a twelve month timeline. Press reports indicate that the French Minister of Cooperation brokered a deal with the CNDD to hold elections within twelve months, but the CNDD has not officially acknowledged this decision. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Charge attended two separate meetings with Guinea's international partners over the weekend to discuss concerns over the December 23 coup. The first was with the visiting ECOWAS delegation, led by ECOWAS Executive Secretary Dr. Mohamed Chambas and General (and former president of Nigeria) Ibrahim Babangida. Attendees included Ambassadors and Charges from Spain, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, Mali, and the United Kingdom. The second meeting was with the UN's regional representative, Said Djinnit, who is based in Dakar. Spain, the EU, the UNDP, Germany and the United Kingdom participated in the second meeting.

ECOWAS LOOKING TO BUILD DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

¶3. (SBU) General Babangida told the assembled diplomats that ECOWAS' intent is to help "facilitate the building of democratic institutions" in Guinea. A Burkinabe member of the delegation added that securing peace in the sub-region is also a priority. Explaining the delegation's immediate objective, Chambas said that ECOWAS is focused on working toward a peaceful and timely transfer of power to a civilian government, and asked the diplomatic corps to help provide solutions. Babangida noted that ECOWAS has experience working with Guineans, pointing out that the ECOWAS delegation helped broker the tripartite agreement that ended the labor strikes and subsequent civil unrest in 2007. He added that ECOWAS intended to congratulate the CNDD (Council for Democracy and Development) for its success in keeping the military "calm" through the transition period. (COMMENT. Babangida led the ECOWAS delegation in 2007 and was perceived to have been highly instrumental in getting President Conte to accede to civilian demands. END COMMENT).

¶4. (SBU) The international community highlighted a number of shared concerns. Questions as to how the new government will be structured, what role the CNDD will play, and who ultimately will hold power were at the top of the list. The

Spanish Ambassador said that the new government's priorities remain unclear while others commented that the CNDD sometimes appears to be contradicting itself.

15. (SBU) On the issue of elections, opinions were divided. The Liberian Ambassador agreed with Charge Raspolic, saying that elections should be held within the next six months. He followed that statement with a question as to whether the assembled countries intended to formally recognize the new government if it announces an elections date, but the diplomats were noncommittal. The Senegalese Charge mentioned that Senegalese President Wade had cancelled a planned visit to Guinea because the CNDD had failed to announce an election date. The Malian Ambassador, who is new to Guinea, said that it would be impossible to hold elections in six months. According to him, a twelve month timeframe was more realistic, noting that "it is important to do it right." A lawyer by trade, he added that a national conference to address constitutional and electoral reform issues would be useful. The Ghanaian Ambassador commented that he was concerned about "forcing Guinean to hold elections too soon."

16. (SBU) The ECOWAS delegation is scheduled to leave Conakry on January 5, and is expected to convene another meeting with the diplomatic corps before departing.

UNITED NATIONS LOOKING AT 12 MONTHS FOR ELECTION TIMELINE

17. (SBU) The UN representative, Said Djinnit, said that he was not surprised by the coup. However, he noted that divisions within the military appear to continue. Djinnit said that opposition political parties may see Conte's death and the subsequent coup as an opportunity to capitalize on

the population's fear to win control of the government, although his meaning was not clear and he did not clarify. He said that the UN is looking for Guinea to hold elections within twelve months.

18. (SBU) The participating Ambassadors and Charges highlighted concerns similar to those raised in the ECOWAS meeting, including questions of power structure, security, and continued political divisions at the top. With respect to elections, the United Kingdom and the European Union, along with Charge Raspolic, said that they continue to call for elections within six months. Pointing out that the EU has already invested 30 million Euros in Guinea's electoral process, the EU representative said that voter registration is now "50% complete." He added that the EU has no preference as to whether or not the presidential election is held concurrently with the legislative election. The EU raised the point that the Supreme Court is the body legally mandated to resolve electoral disputes, but since the CNDD dissolved the Supreme Court, it is unclear what body would have final authority over the electoral process.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Both meetings were called at the last minute so the diplomatic representation was not as widespread as it might have been had representatives been notified earlier. Western diplomats continue to hold to a six month timeline for elections, but there is a growing sense that such a timeline may be unrealistic. As noted by several diplomats during the meetings, some civilian contacts are pushing to reform the constitution before moving to elections. There are also concerns over the voter registration process, despite the EU assertion that 50% of voters have already been registered. Most ECOWAS nations and the UN seem to be willing to work toward a twelve month timeline. The immediate concern for most appears to be defining the Guinean Government's new power structure and reinforcing a civilian transition leading to elections.

¶10. (U) The French Minister of Cooperation also visited Conakry over the weekend. International and local press alike reported that the French delegation was satisfied with its discussions with the CNDD. The Minister was quoted as saying that France not currently planning to cut any "humanitarian or cooperation assistance." The BBC announced that the French had brokered a deal with the new government to hold elections within twelve months, but the CNDD has not confirmed this decision. END COMMENT.
RASPOLIC